

Commentary...

Suttle Tie Trail offers Cascade views

By Mike Morical
The Bulletin

SISTERS (AP) — The Deschutes National Forest just northwest of Sisters has long held a commanding allure for me when it comes to outdoor pursuits.

The fascination starts with the Metolius River, where I took my son on his first camping trip when he was five years old and where we return for a few days each summer — now with his little sister as well — to watch the towering ponderosa pines climb toward the Milky Way in a clear night sky, pig out on s'mores and pray we catch at least one rainbow trout.

But even without the nostalgia, that part of Central Oregon is a special place. Sure, it is located on the crowded traffic corridor along U.S. Highway 20 that links the High Desert and the Willamette Valley. But venture off the highway just a few miles and you find paradise.

Northeast of the highway is Black Butte and the Metolius. Southeast of the highway is a lesser-known mountain bike trail that starts near Black Butte Ranch.

The Suttle Tie Trail, by itself, is perhaps a forgettable stretch of doubletrack and singletrack. But where it is located, among giant ponderosa and lodgepole pines, yellow wildflowers and blooming manzanita (this time of year), makes it memorable. And it leads to the 4-mile loop trail around shimmering Suttle Lake, making for a scenic 14-mile ride that is ideal for mountain bikers of almost any skill level because the trail is relatively flat and nontechnical.

The trailhead is about a 45-minute drive from Bend, located just off Highway 20 at George McAllister Road.

After parking at the trailhead last week, I mounted my bike and began the ride. The trail started as a dirt road, then merged into singletrack a few miles in. Eventually, snow-covered Mount Jefferson popped up on the horizon.

Soon I crossed a forest road and came upon scenic Lake Creek, which flows out of the east end of Suttle Lake. The trail there took me through a dense canopy of trees — almost like riding through a dark tunnel even on a bright, sunny day.

The relatively new Lake

Creek Trail passes under a short bridge on Highway 20 and follows the creek north-east all the way to Camp Sherman and the Metolius River. It starts out as single-track but eventually becomes more of a dirt road closer to Camp Sherman.

Deep in the trees, I merged onto the Suttle Lake Loop Trail and soon thereafter arrived at the east end of the lake.

The trail was just a few feet from the shore as I rode the loop clockwise around the lake. That portion of the trail, on the lake's south side, runs through several campsites, so bikers should yield to any campers.

The loop trail also attracts many runners and hikers in the summertime, so riding under control is a must.

Riding past the campsites got me excited for camping this summer, bringing to mind those long days outside with the kids. While most of the sites were empty on that midweek day, they will no doubt fill up fast on summer weekends, as the four campgrounds in the Suttle Lake area are extremely popular.

After cruising over a small bridge to the north side of

Suttle Lake, I glanced back and saw Mount Washington — still mostly covered in snow — towering over the lake in the distance.

On the north side of the lake, several anglers cast their lines from shore, taking their chances at landing some of the kokanee, brown trout and whitefish that make the 250-acre lake their home.

I cruised along the trail, picking up speed as a couple of butterflies fluttered past my handlebars. At the day-use area on the east end of the lake, I stopped for a quick snack and to take in the view of Cache Mountain and Mount Washington rising above the sun-splashed water.

The Suttle Tie Trail made for a fairly quick ride back to the car to complete the lollipop route.

For a shorter option, riders could also drive to Suttle Lake Resort and ride only the four-mile loop around the lake. The loop trail is family-friendly, and many sections could be easily ridden by youngsters.

To get in more miles in the Sisters area, mountain bikers can head to the Peterson Ridge Trailhead just south of town. The area is home to a

vast network of trails that volunteers with the Sisters Trail Alliance have spent thousands of hours improving in recent years.

On my way back to Bend, I stopped in Sisters and rode a quick six miles at Peterson Ridge to make it a 20-mile day.

But the 14-mile Suttle Tie and Loop makes for a complete ride, both for novice mountain bikers and for more advanced riders.

And it takes bikers through a truly majestic section of the Deschutes National Forest.

Directions: From Sisters, drive 10 miles northwest on U.S. Highway 20. Turn left on George McAllister Road and park immediately.

Distance: About a 14-mile ride total, two to three hours.

Rating: Technically easy and aerobically moderate.

Trail features: Relatively flat and rolling single-track through a ponderosa and lodgepole pine forest along the Suttle Tie Trail, which includes doubletrack and singletrack. Views of Lake Creek and Suttle Lake along the singletrack Suttle Lake Loop Trail. Avoid the loop on busy summer weekends.

WILSONS 54th ANNIVERSARY

Sale

OVER 90
SOFAS &
SECTIONALS

OVER 20
DINING &
BEDROOM SETS

Up
To

50% OFF

OVER 220
MATTRESS
SETS

OVER 100
RECLINERS

& MORE

OVER 700
ACCESORIES

ON FURNITURE & MATTRESSES

CENTRAL OREGON'S LARGEST SELECTION

FREE DELIVERY*



SPECIAL FINANCING AVAILABLE*

WILSONS of Redmond

Still The Oldest & Largest Furniture Store in Central Oregon!

Wilson's MATTRESS Gallery-Bend

Next to Olive Garden

2071 S Hwy 97, Redmond • 541-548-2066

Apply for Credit online at
www.wilsonsofredmond.net

63485 N Hwy 97, Bend • 541-330-5084